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Demographic and social statistics: population and housing censuses

Population and housing censuses

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted to the Statistical Commission in accordance with its request, at its thirty-third session, that the United Nations Statistics Division report back to the Commission at its thirty-fourth session on the extent to which the Division had been able to incorporate required actions into its work programme.[a]

[a] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Supplement No. 4* (E/2002/24, E/CN.3/2002/31), para. 5 (c).

* E/CN.3/2003/1.

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I. Background

1. The Statistical Commission, at its thirty-third session, reviewed activities undertaken by the United Nations Statistics Division in relation to the 2000 World Population and Housing Censuses Programme (1995-2004) and endorsed the proposed activities.[1] Furthermore, the Commission expressed the need to carry out additional activities, recognizing that with existing resources it would not be possible for the Division to address all those issues.[2] With regard to resources, it should be noted that the priorities proposed below are largely based on expectations regarding the regular budget of the Division. To the extent that extrabudgetary funds will become available, more activities will be possible.

2. The present report summarizes the activities that have been undertaken since the thirty-third session of the Commission, approved activities for 2003, activities proposed for the biennium 2004-2005 for approval by the Commission and activities requested by the Commission that may be programmed into the work of the Division in subsequent bienniums.

II. Activities of the United Nations Statistics Division

A. Activities executed in 2002

3. The Division has (a) conducted training programmes to strengthen national capabilities to undertake census operations, analysis, dissemination and promotion of census results (see the annex for a list of the training workshops); (b) drafted and submitted for publication the handbook on the collection of fertility and mortality data; (c) issued a technical report on collection of economic characteristics in population censuses;[3] and (d) published the proceedings of the global review of the 2000 round of population and housing censuses, on the theme "Mid-decade assessment and future prospects", held in New York from 7 to 11 August 2001;[4] and (e) started drafting a handbook on household demographic and social surveys.

B. Activities planned for 2003

4. An expert group will be convened in 2003 to review the handbook on household demographic and social surveys. In addition, the Division plans to conduct a number of workshops and meetings in 2003 and will incorporate into the agenda of the workshops several of the concerns expressed in the actions of the Commission. For example, the *Demographic Yearbook* is being reviewed extensively for appraisal by an expert group meeting in 2003. The review will also assess the levels of reporting on the census topics covered in the census data compilation for the *Yearbook*. That initial report will serve as input to the effort to review a minimum and essential list of census topics (see para. 17 below).

C. Activities requested by the Commission and proposed for the biennium 2004-2005[2]

5. Two specific activities requested by the Commission at its thirty-third session will be addressed in the biennium 2004-2005, as described below.

Follow-up symposium on the experience of the 2000 round of censuses[2]

6. In its work programme for the biennium 2004-2005, the Division has proposed the organization, in 2004, of a symposium on the theme "World Population and Housing Census Programme: current needs and future prospects".

Reports

7. A technical report on the collection, compilation and dissemination of international migration statistics is proposed in the work programme for the biennium 2004-2005. As input for this activity, the *Demographic Yearbook* questionnaire on international migration and travel statistics is being updated to reflect the conceptual framework presented in *Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, Revision 1*.[3]

Other activities

8. In addition, several other activities are planned for the biennium 2004-2005 that address the broad concerns targeted by the Commission.

D. Activities requested by the Commission and proposed for work programmes in 2006 and beyond[2]

Supplementary annex to *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 1*

9. The Division proposes to prepare a supplementary annex to the *Principles and Recommendations* through a series of activities, including review and compilation of national experience and country participation in seminars and expert group meetings. The drafting and review will be undertaken in 2006, in consultation with member States and regional commissions, and the annex will be prepared in 2007.

Possibility of producing reports on the use of censuses for monitoring human settlements, in particular slums

10. As to human settlements, including the review of definitions of urban/rural, cities, agglomerations, an internal seminar was conducted in October 2002, in which the United States Bureau of the Census, a representative of the working group on urbanization of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population and an expert on cities and urbanization participated. A summary of the conclusions of the seminar is circulated as a background note to the Commission.

11. As to reports on the other elements proposed by the Commission, no specific activities have been planned at this stage.

Discussion groups on the future role of censuses (recognizing the important role that censuses have in the preparation of development strategies) and on approaches to and the underlying philosophy of censuses and how they have changed over time

12. Discussion groups on the above topics will be incorporated into the 2004 symposium (see para. 6 above) and other workshops that the Statistics Division will sponsor. The Division will also convene side meetings at conferences of

international professional associations, such as the International Statistical Institute and the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population, and other international meetings and regional conferences. The Division will further develop the symposium web site to include a chapter highlighting issues in this area, including national experience, emanating from the above-mentioned meetings; to facilitate the exchange of country experience; and to enable a continuous dialogue among national and international experts.

Workshops

13. In addition to the eight census-related workshops organized in 2002 (see annex), the Division will propose two workshops a year in its work programmes for 2006-2009.

Country support and technical cooperation

14. Training workshops will be organized, using the *Handbook on Geographical Information Systems and Digital Mapping*[6] as the basic reference material and complemented with other technical materials that address the specific needs of the participating countries. Fellowships and study tours will also be offered to support countries and respond to specific requests for assistance in information technology and digitized mapping. In addition, the theme of adopting new technologies to effectively conduct censuses will also be covered in the 2004 symposium (see para. 6 above).

Use of the Internet

15. The use of the Internet in census enumeration is still at its early stage of development. To analyse the state of the art, the Division will compile a list of countries that have already begun work in this area or are planning to initiate the use of the Internet. Although the use of the Internet for census dissemination is relatively more developed, its technical developments still require attention and follow-up. An effort will be made to assist the exchange of information and experiences in this form of use of the Internet. In particular, a handbook on census data dissemination,[7] which will include a chapter on the use of the Internet, will be produced in 2006. Some workshops will also be organized, using the handbook.

Census costs

16. Noting concerns of national statistical offices on assuring the quality and value of the censuses in the context of cost containment and related concerns on cost recovery, the Division will include the topic in the 2004 symposium (see para. 6 above). It will also seek illustrative examples from countries for further review at upcoming workshops and meetings.

Minimum list of census topics

17. Two major activities of the Division on population censuses will serve as a basis for work on the minimum and essential list of census topics. On the one hand, the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses* provides a list of possible topics for collection of data in national population and housing censuses. On the other hand, *Demographic Yearbook* data collection provides another list of topics on which data are being compiled at the international

level (see para. 4 above). A review of the content of national census questionnaires will also provide a basis for assessing the most common questions that are included in national censuses and the extent to which international standards on concepts and definitions are being applied. The Division proposes to convene an expert group in 2006 to review a proposed list of minimum and essential topics.

III. Points for action by the Commission

18. The Statistical Commission may wish to:

(a) Review the priorities proposed for 2004-2005 and subsequent years;

(b) Comment on substantive issues set out in the proposed list of activities.

Notes

[1] See E/CN.3/2002/2, paras. 15-18.

[2] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Supplement No. 4* (E/2002/24, E/CN.3/2002/31), para. 5.

[3] ST/ESA/STAT/119; English only.

[4] See http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demog/all_doc.asp.

[5] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.14.

[6] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.00.XVII.12.

[7] See E/CN.3/2002/2, para. 16 (e).

Annex

Training workshops conducted in 2002 on census-related topics

1. Workshop on census tabulations for CIS countries and Baltic States, Kiev, 21 to 25 October 2002.
2. Workshop on analysis, promotion and dissemination of census data for SADC member countries, Ezulwini, Swaziland, 5-30 August 2002.
3. Workshop on survey sample design for the SADC region, Windhoek, 15-19 July 2002.
4. Workshop on dissemination of census statistics in ASEAN countries, Phnom Penh, 24-28 June 2002.
5. Meeting on a core set of census topics for ESCWA countries, Cairo, 8-12 June 2002.
6. Meeting on disability measurement in population and housing censuses for ESCWA countries, Cairo, 1-5 June 2002.
7. Workshop on census data captures for ESCWA member countries, Amman, 18-23 May 2002.
8. Regional workshop on census data processing for French-speaking countries, jointly with UNFPA and the United States Bureau of the Census, Dakar, 14 March-6 April 2002.